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"Ha, you missed!" Mary calls out as she dodges nimbly away from Burl's outstretched hand holding the old tail. Young Burl stumbles forward into the doorway, his shoulder hitting it with a resounding thud. Only last month Mary was taller than him, but now he has caught up with her height, and though he has always been heavier than she, he is now even more uncoordinated than before. "Still tripping over your feet, graceful?" Eleanor calls out glibly from behind him, throwing her long braided hair back, getting his attention for a moment as her friend Mary sidesteps him once again. The others scatter as the "Tail" comes toward them. "Here Tail, here Caudea," as the game is known, and the one with the tail is called. "Try this way" Eleanor once again calls out. The look of frustration flashes across his face.

He eyes her, fully aware Eleanor is too fast in the open for him to catch, and she knows it. He sees some of the others have moved to the stairs leading farther into basement of the old stone building, down where the winter supplies are kept and where the lights shine dimly, though there are no lamps or windows to shed true light within. As he dives for the younger ones, they head down the stairs and he follows closely, but not too close, for is not they he is after. It isn't fun to tag the young ones, but the girls won't hesitate to defend them, so he is sure they will follow.

Down the stairs, the boxes and bags of things are piled high. Many seasons of supplies are stored here along with the extra furniture, unused now, from up the mountainside. Why things don't rot here and spoil they are unsure, but they don't so everything is stored with in these old walls. The narrow passages between the rows of tables and pillars are too high to see over, even for someone as tall as Giuseppe. Laughter and footsteps lead into the twisting pathways, which crisscross as a weaver would a scarf. Burl hurries on.

Heavy footsteps advertise his approach, but Mary is sure the smaller children are close at hand as well, often making more noise when trying to be quiet than else wise. She turns a corner moving quickly, too quickly, realizing she has Burl before her and cannot stop. She slams into his back, nearly at full speed, sending him into a mountain of bags and boxes, toppling tables and stored chairs. The collision stuns her, but she remains on her feet, standing just about where Burl had stood but a moment before. From within the twisted pile of things, Burl's voice calls out in pain and anger, "I'll get you for that" as he tries to free himself from his entrapment pulling more things down upon him. Mary, jolted out of her bewilderment by the tone of his voice more than the words, tears off deeper into the maze, afraid to look back but knowing the heavy footsteps are not far behind her.

"Mommy" Eleanor is faintly heard calling in the background as she runs up stairs, but the trouble they will be in for being down here is nothing to what Burl will do if he gets his hands on her. Ducking and dodging through the basement, around the large jars of unknown items and under an old desk, she slips into a part of the lower areas she has never been before. An alcove leads through the heavily reinforced old stonewalls of the building toward a small passage. She stops, catching her breath, listening for the footsteps; she overhears whispers in the dark.

Within the passage beyond, a young man and woman are speaking endearments as to their future. "Once you complete the official ceremony, you will be a real guard, and my father cannot keep us apart any longer", Amber says softly but with conviction. "Just a couple of months away, but it seems like an eternity, doesn't it?" Kane replies as Amber rests her head upon his broad shoulders. Mary moves closer, to hear better. The young couple is quiet though, simply holding each onto each other. Kane wipes a loose lock of auburn hair from Amber's green eyes slowly, brushing her cheek gently with his coarse and calloused hand.

Just then, a loud crash echoes throughout the basement, a token of Burl's search, and the young couple sees Mary watching them. "Get out of here you little turd," Amber screams at Mary, and throws a basket with an assortment of small items at Mary's feet, even as Mary races back to the stairs. Eleanor's mother yells from the floor above, thus sending all the children running for the stairs and away from the scene of the crime. The young couple also flees from their hiding place, knowing to be caught would mean not seeing each other anytime soon, or, heaven forbid, not at all ever again. As suddenly as the commotion started, it

is over. And once again the basement is as it was before, quiet and still, the entire hubbub returning to the surface once again.

All that is left is the darkness and the hungry eyes watching from farther down a dark corridor, a passage leading, eventually to the lower, forgotten levels of the great Fortress upon the mountainside and the evil that lies within....
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[The arrival at the village]

“And this knot, little one, means we will be having visitors before the next new moon.”
— Brina

As the rolling hills rise higher and higher to peaks that in turn form deeper and deeper valleys, the travelers approach the last leg of their journey. The mountains, once so distant, now rise around them. Large fields of shrubs and evergreen trees, dotted with an occasional oak and other wide-leafed oddities, fight for every inch of footing from the mountains themselves. Fields of shale and stone allow no further advancement up the great mountainside above. Up ahead, a great cleft in the very side of the mountains leads into a small sheltered valley. A massive, eternally snow-covered mountain looms ominously above a tiny village, equally surrounding it, protecting it, and yet subjecting it to its whims.

When the characters finally arrive at the village, it has been two or three days since their stay at the Torrance barn. A cold breeze blows down off the snow-capped mountains. A small, isolated village is nestled in a valley between several very large mountains. Only one road enters the valley, as the mountains loom ominously overhead. There are several old, low, stone buildings in the center of the village, around them there are more modern wooden structures including a small chapel, a stable, and several other buildings, some with construction in progress. Already, cobwebs are forming on the new construction. A small cart path leads through the village and veers sharply up the mountainside. Off in the distance, far up the mountain the path is barely visible, weaving its way to what must be the covenant site. Built into the mountain, a solid stone gatehouse is just visible through the low cloud-cover that hangs over the mountains year-round. Off in the distance, fields and pastures hold several flocks of sheep and goats. Small gardens surround some of the structures. Well worn tack adorns the lone ox in the closest field. A stable hand tries to persuade another ox into the field, though he doesn't seem to be winning. The smell of fresh-baked bread wafts around the party as they move toward a crowd of children, who, spying them, start yelling “bubbathern” or something similarly hard to make out.

Except for these obvious features, have the characters make a Per roll to notice anything else.

- 1+ The people are watching you at least as much as you are watching them.
- 3+ Almost all of the wooden buildings look to have been built in the last few years.
- 6+ The place is tended well. The few stone buildings look very old. They are emblazoned with the crest of the covenant: a griffon rampant standing over a key.
- 9+ This seems to be a sheep/goat village. There are some people in the fields and a few sheep dogs run about. If magi are around, this is obvious, since they get barked at a lot.
- 12+ The tanner's is over there. There doesn't seem to be the putrid smell you get with tanners.
- 15+ There's the chapel. The old buildings are all stone and made to withstand an avalanche.
- 18+ There are many more spiders here in comparison to other places this high in the mountains.

A man in shining chain armor wades through the excited children, introducing himself as the Seneschal. He asks what their business is here in a very business-like tone. Some may note a slight air of hostility in his demeanor. He is wary of “intruders,” especially those that bring warriors with them. If they announce themselves as being on a mission from Clavius, his response will be “So. Who cares about what he wants? Are you here to steal more stuff for him?” When the Clavius arrived a year ago, he was allowed into the covenant because he had Vilarious' writ. He would have received the same cold reception as the characters had he merely announced himself and expected entrance. Once he finds out that they are on a mission from Vilarious he will open up somewhat and invite them in. The Seneschal will escort them wherever they go. He will stay at the village at night, but otherwise will be at their side during their stay. The Seneschal is

under The Oath (See Chapter 4, page 16) so he will not be especially talkative, he will nevertheless be very professional.

[[Begin Insert: Village secrets]]

The stone buildings have at least two basements. They are designed to survive both an avalanche and a siege. The villagers aren't aware of their purpose, so the wooden buildings they have built would probably all be swept away in a reasonably sized slide. There are lower tunnels which connect the old stone buildings together and to the covenant. These lead into the sealed areas of the covenant.

Magical investigation will show intricate wards upon the stone buildings. The buildings themselves are magical items enchanted with spells to counter direct magical assault (ReVi 45) as well as an assault by the elements (ReAq 45, ReAu 45, ReIg 45, ReTe 45). Certain areas within these buildings also have a means to preserve rations for extended periods of time (ReAn (He) 45)

[[End Insert]]

[The ways of the village]

“Come along Mr. Knife. Let's go talk to the new people.”

—Margareta

This place is cold and so are the people. Cold winds constantly blow down out of the mountains. The villagers keep strangers at arm's length until they can win their trust, which is not easy. There are only about 50 people here and little interaction with the outside world.

This is more of a second covenant site than a real village. It's sort of the “outside part” of the covenant. Its original purpose was to serve the covenant and its people have done so ever since. Breakfast and supper are the two meals that are very important. Everyone gets together in the largest stone building and eats with very strict seating arrangements—the eldest at the head of his or her own table, the important leader types at the foot, and the children in the middle. Visitors will have to wait to be seated unless they want a stern talking to by everyone present. This is how rank and prestige is worked out among the villagers. Sitting one seat up or down is very important to them, and woe to the one who inadvertently “steals” someone's chair.

Once per season, except in winter, the villagers get together and send some men to town to trade. They usually stop at the farmstead (“The Torrance farmstead” in Chapter 2) and allow them to ride along.

The magi, over time, have fashioned or appropriated many minor magical items to help the villagers in their toil. The village families have several small magical items provided by the covenant among them. For example, the village has a magical wagon and harness for the oxen which makes travel easier and smoother. There are magical beakers and tongs used by craftsmen. Some of this stuff is revered for some of the wrong reasons. The villagers think it is special when it is not, or, rather, they don't view these magical items as being magical but as being lucky or blessed.

The beliefs of the townsfolk are warped by time and tradition. They do not believe that all of these items are magical but rather gifts from God. The various items are attributed virtues associated with various obscure saints. This has been cultivated over the years by Luther, and other priests from times past. So, for example, the magic spike that removes old tree stumps is attributed this power because it is dedicated to Saint Niacrinus, the great stump saint. The fact that he isn't a stump saint is immaterial—it's what the villagers believe. In fact, if a saint is especially unknown or obscure, they are most likely to be attributed some odd virtue for which these villagers venerate them. If the party disputes these beliefs, they will be faced with the villagers being very angry with them, including not being invited to dinner.

The villagers also have several rituals they perform for no apparent reason. An example of one is when they greet people they call them Thermbub-greet. There used to be a Redcap that came through there called Therma. She always called the men Bub, as in “Hey, bub!” It was a tradition at that time to greet everyone who arrived in town: “Therma! Greetings!” Or “Grimgroth! Greetings!” Over time anyone who arrived became known as Thermbubgreet as everyone forgot the real reason for greeting people.

[The Villagers]

sniff, sniff. "Grrr. Strangers. Woof"
— Rufio

The villagers are in fact covenfolk who live below the covenant. They raise and process the covenant's goats and sheep. There is a small amount of farming, though the ground here isn't well suited to many crops. They travel to the nearest town for trade once per season, barring winter. There they trade skins, meat, and wool for supplies that come from the lowlands. They also have a good market for book bindings (goatskin) and export the material used to bind books to other covenants. These are of exceptional quality, one of the few remaining artifacts from a once glorious past. The covenant isn't using nearly as much as it once did since there aren't as many magi here as there used to be.

Initially, the villagers may lie to the characters to get them to go away. They are very loyal to their covenant. They feel that outsiders will just mess things up. Even if they're here to help, they don't like strangers poking their noses around *their* stuff. They simply want people to just leave them alone because their problems are their problem, not anyone else's. Yes, it is a nasty place up there in the mountain, but it is *their* nasty place. It is for them to deal with it, even if they don't know how.

There has been a long history of hostile encounters with both local nobility and members of the Order. Over time the villagers have been told, or simply learned, to not trust outsiders, as almost all have had ulterior motives. The historian, Philippe, is still not trusted by some villagers, and he's been here among them for five years, though he has gained the trust of some of the younger men.

Over the course of the season or so that the characters will be here, it is very important that the villagers are on their side. Without the villagers, the characters may have trouble finding the necessary resources just to survive. If they do not want to stay at the covenant for long periods of time, they will have to convince the villagers to let them stay in their homes. If the characters change the villagers' view of them (they never really "like" them), they will get

- Various clues/red herrings
- When and where each disappearance took place
- The Bonisagus' letter, from Volens
- Who is at the covenant and a basic run down of what they do
- Recent history
- Specific answers to specific questions (maybe)
- Food on a regular basis
- A place to stay other than at the covenant if necessary

Without the basic trust of the villagers, the characters will get only cursory help from them. They may be made to pay exorbitant rates for food, and given very shoddy shelter. They may find that dinner conversation consists of only insults thrown their way and other such "local niceties."

[The Families]

"You're not from around here, are you? Say, are you related to Philippe? He's not from around here either."
— practically everyone.

There are seven extended families in the village. Each family is responsible for fulfilling a specific need of the covenant. These areas are not set in stone; there may be some crossing over between duties based on marriage. It is considered prestigious to have members of the family work for the covenant and to perform important services. As a matter of fact, these villagers are somewhat eccentric, either due to inbreeding or living in and near the covenant. Each family may have different views on issues important to them, however, they generally won't discuss them with outsiders. This leaves room for interfamily rivalries or whatever the storyteller desires. Keep in mind that as a whole, they present a unified face to anyone "not

from around here.” They are proud of their covenant and want it to do well. They are afraid of recent events, but are sure things will work out.

In general, they all have similar features, with only slight variances. For the most part, the villagers have dark hair and fair skin. Their clothes aren't terribly flashy, but some can be quite colorful.

The Binder family is the most respected family among the villagers. They make book binding material and thus have the most income. Because they do so well, the covenant makes money and the family has prestige amongst their brethren. They also have provided the covenant a large proportion of the needed scribes and apprentices over the years. Currently, Risa and Candra are the scribe and illuminator for the covenant.

The Binders have lighter colored hair and have the tendency to wear darker colored clothes. In the hopes of creating a covenant uniform and thus garner even more prestige, those family members in the service of the covenant wear black and dark grays. No one else has yet to follow suit.

Binder family members include: Dominica, dead apprentice; Corbin, dead grog; Aldino, librarian; Tomas, family leader; Volens, church caretaker; and of course, Risa and Candra.

The Hanson and Farmer families do general labor. This isn't a miscellaneous “do you have any work?” kind of general labor, but rather a catchall category for which the others haven't taken charge. They do general maintenance, including carpentry and masonry. They have charge of the village wagon, magicked to hold lots of goods and to make travel easier. They have had a boost to their village prestige as one of them is now the covenant Astrologer. During festivals they maintain the traditions by keeping the decorations fresh.

The Hanson family members are tall in general, and have dark curly hair. The men sport mustaches and beards; those who do wrong are forcibly shaved as a penalty. Often they wear very colorful clothing as compared to most of the other villagers. Stripes and checkered patterns are common in their attire.

Hanson family members include: Barnabus, dead apprentice; Hans, servant; Bardo, grog; Sebastien, astrologer.

The Farmer's have fine, straight, dark hair often braided. They wear very colorful clothing as the Hanson's do, although more in bright clashing solid colors than patterns.

Farmer family members include: Michael, old gatekeeper; Carmine, the hiding apprentice; Anna, servant; Sofia, family elder.

The Herders and the Shepards raise sheep and goats. The Herders also have three cows and two oxen. They tend the stables and arrange feeding and shearing. They are the principle instigators of the seasonal drives to market. The Herders have an animal doctor, Celia, who also acts as a midwife and surgeon for the villagers. As they are mostly out in the pastures for much of the year, any visitors will have to work hard to get to know them, let alone meet them all, unless they too journey into the fields and pastures. Rufio is also in charge of raising dogs: use generic dog stats *The Medieval Bestiary*, page 17 or *A Medieval Tapestry*, page 113. This family has a magic horn to warn against attack or danger

The Herder family has light colored eyes and a medium complexion with curly hair; both men and women regularly tie back their hair in a knot. They mostly wear mild colors like tans or grays.

Herder family members include: Claudio, grog; Pasquale, grog; Giuseppe, family leader; Gregory, custos.

Shephard family members have thick curly hair with reddish tints. They often wear dark colored clothes; dark browns and greens, as well as oversized hooded cloaks.

Shephard family members include: Milo, grog; Vera, family leader, Rufio, dog handler.

[[Begin Insert: The Sheep]]

The sheep of the village are a vis source. Certain sheep are known to grow wool of various colors, which is where the villagers get their sometimes garish clothing. Once per year, at shearing time, these odd sheep may be sheared for a pawn of Imáginem vis each; approximately five sheep may be harvested each year. Each year, these sheep will grow a different color of wool. It's hard to tell which colors will be next .

[[End Insert]]

The Weavers process all the skins and wool from the sheep and goats. They share one of the stone buildings, magicked to keep the smells down. Brina, an old matron of the Weaver family, used to be the covenant's Astrologer, until she started to go blind. At that time, the "new" astrologer took on a stronger role. This has caused some friction because Sebastien is from the Hanson family—his technique is totally different from old Brina's.

The Weavers have the darkest complexion in the village except for Philippe, though this is by no means unusual for the area, with dark braided hair contrasting with their pale clothing. They wear beige and white in general, with bright blue or green accents.

Weaver family members include: Brina, family elder, and old astrologer, Herman, custos.

The Cook family makes cheese and stores meats. They inhabit a stone building that preserves the foods stored there. They also do some farming and gardening. The basement of their building holds the village's fresh water supply, a well. This building is also connected to the main covenant via a subterranean tunnel. Only the matron knows how to traverse this safely. (See page 10)

The Cook family is the smallest in stature of the families: in general a head shorter than the Hansons. They have long dark hair which they keep braided, wear brighter colored clothes and have very fair skin.

Cook family members include: Margareta, covenant cook; Guntero, Seneschal; Cordelia, family elder.

[The oldest villagers]

"Hey mister. Hey! Tell us about that ocean-thing again."

— a child named Mary.

On the way through the village to the covenant, the party will pass by these two old codgers.

Brina, an old weaver woman who used to be the astrologer, now is not quite all there. She sits on her porch and weaves rugs and blankets and such. There is a young girl helping her, Amanda, though she will remain silent in front of the strangers. The old woman reads the weft of fate in that which she weaves. As the stars above affect life on earth, so too does her weaving reflect the macrocosm above. When the party meets her, she will rub her hands on the finished portions of the blanket she is weaving. The knots and such will tell her things about the party. She will probably say something like "Mars follows you. It's fortunate you are here at this time." This is a reference to the coming bandit attack.

Michael, the old gatekeeper, is a drunkard and can't remember much of anything without good ale in his hand. He sits at the bottom of the track to the covenant gate. He has been forced to retire and now sits at the edge of the village doing his old job, though not under the auspices of the covenant per se. He is somewhat resentful of the fact that he was retired for a magical item. He dislikes his situation, but compensates by acting as an impromptu guardian at the bottom of the trail. He has constructed a rude gate of stones and sticks that everyone must pass through. Now he sits and drinks and watches people come to and fro. He only stops those he does not know, but occasionally tosses a jibe at those that pass by, especially the Seneschal.

[The covenant folk at the village]

"At least they won't replace me with a ton of bricks, old man."

—The Seneschal

There are a small number of covenfolk that are living at the village since the troubles began. They are the Seneschal, historian, astrologer, a few maids, and a cook. There are also a few ancient covenfolk who have retired back to the village that are still here

The Seneschal

The Seneschal is the highest ranked non-magus person in the covenant. His name is Guntero, but everyone simply calls him the Seneschal, except his mother, Cordelia. The next in command would have been the gatekeeper, except the gatekeeper is now retired. The Seneschal lords his position over the people of the area. He is loyal to the covenant, not necessarily to the people of the covenant. The captain's Oath is a little less stringent than the grogs' Oath. While the grogs always looking to the defense of the covenant (and thus may be seen as little more than living automatons), he can speak freely after he has seen to his duty.

[[Begin Insert: Guard Schedule]]

The four grogs left at the covenant follow the following guard schedule. A shift is a whole day. All grogs move through the following shift schedule at staggered intervals: Guard Vinitania, guard the gate, guard Vinitania, off duty.

Day two grogs with Vinitania
 one grog at the front gate
 one off duty who stays in the village

The Seneschal roams the village and covenant. He sometimes does a shift with the guards so he could be anywhere. He tries to stick near to where visitors are.

Night All are at the village.

[[End Insert]]

Astrologer

Sebastien keeps track of time and festivals. He knows about the oaths and when to administer them. He is responsible for all the auspicious events. He is a shaman-type with lots of bells and trinkets hanging all over him. He is friendly enough and normal to speak with, and generally tries to "read" anyone he speaks with before he says anything out of place. He won't blurt out the results of his reading but he also won't hide the info if asked. The storyguide can use this to extrapolate upon character Flaws (i.e., Judged Unfairly, Cursed, et cetera). He has no clue what or why the events at the covenant above are occurring.

Historian

Philippe is a new instructor, historian, and a generally knowledgeable guy. He scribes a few languages and is slated to become the new librarian in time. He generally rattles off eclectic and useless information. His job is catalog and correlate historical events. He works with the librarian and has a Library Lore skill. He is sort of fearful of strangers since he isn't sure if his real employer is angry at him or not. He is the one who brought the "poisoned" vis that Vinitania used to affect her state (see Appendix 1, page 1), though he doesn't know it was the vis that did it. He just knows that he brought some vis. He likes it better here than in his old covenant (they don't fight much here) and will do what he can to stay.

The astrologer and historian know there is bad stuff afoot. Everyone else is under the delusion that they can handle it. These two think otherwise. They don't know what to do, however. These two won't be met by the party unless asked for or the party spends time for a meal at the village, even then, Philippe will be subtly avoiding them.

[The Shrine]

"Ignorant, ungrateful, puddin'-headed whelp!"
—Michael

The village chapel used to be a shrine dedicated to St. Niacrinus that grew into a one-room chapel. Still,

it's a fairly simple wooden room with a shrine to St. Niacrinus at one end. There's no heat or windows in this place. Laertes has taken up residence here, for over six months now. He is self-repentant for his sins of pride. Laertes does not even keep his Parma up since he started living down here. Despite this, he gets a lot of sympathy from the local people. They feel sorry for him, but don't really understand why he is taking recent events so hard. He did everything he could to try to save his apprentices and the covenfolk. He saved *them* (the covenfolk) didn't he? Laertes does this because he got caught up in the personal aspects of training apprentices. He got personally involved with them, became their friend, and now that he's sent them to their deaths, he can't stand himself. He feels he murdered them by not preparing them better, or going with them. He knows that to be a proper cog in the Tremere hierarchy you either have to be excellent at something or be reliable at something. He feels he is neither. He knows he'll never be the leader Vinitania is, so he consoled himself to a life of being a good teacher. His problem is that he got too good. He lost his distance between himself and his students. He got to like them, and to become friends with them.

Laertes knows Vilarious is the best thing the covenant has going for them right now, though, this isn't the general view of the villagers. The Seneschal, the gatekeeper, and those with influence from the covenant know Vilarious is "taking care of business."

Volens takes care of the shrine in the off times when he's not required for other Binder family duties. Lately, he's been left alone so he can take care of Laertes. He's been bringing Laertes food and water for the longest time and so has some link to him. He's not a priest, or an altar boy, just an interested other. He's learned some Latin from Luther and from Laertes. He knows a minimal amount of Theology, but no Church Lore.

If the characters start manhandling Laertes, he will run for the Seneschal. If they start bad-mouthing or insulting Laertes Volens will step up to his defense. "Laertes has done a lot. He helps our young one's to better themselves. He's helped me see the world for what it is. He's explained so much, please let him alone!" He will get into a verbal argument loud enough that others will come around to see what the ruckus is about.

Laertes will fly into a flurry of self-pitying hyperbole when he sees that he has magus visitors. He feels they've come to judge him. If he finds out they are on a mission from a quaesitor, he may even try to kill himself. Yes, he's that messed up. Only after careful prying will the characters get a sense of what the hell he's doing out here in the cold. Depending on how they converse with him, they may get some clue as to how the apprentices disappeared. They were all alone, except for some, but those grogs with them, either died or disappeared too. Then again, they may get nothing of use from him if they come on too strong with the Hermetic pride stuff. How they treat Laertes will dictate how the villagers respond to them. They may drive out the characters if they push Laertes over the edge. And remember, the villagers are considered covenfolk by the magi, even if they don't see themselves that way.

If the party somehow reassures Laertes that they are not here to crucify him and they do not hold him to blame for the loss of the apprentices (and they have no Bonisagus wizards among them), they can find out about the individual disappearances. For every apprentice that disappeared, he will lapse into his half-crying, half-angry mode that he will need to be talked out of all over again.

[[Begin Insert: The Bonisagus connection]]

After some time, House Bonisagus has found out from Altresecus that Carmine is now available for training and has written to Laertes to confirm. The tone of the letter is such that it *might* be taken as a threat for Laertes to come up with an apprentice. In reality, if a saner mind were to read the letter, and all can agree that Laertes isn't in the right frame of mind, the intent would be read as one of inquiry, not wrath. Laertes' however, has rapidly spun the implications into a vast conspiracy of House Bonisagus to get him to pay for this lost apprentice in perpetuity, and other harshness. His feelings of inadequacy and loss are maximized when the letter is spoken of and he spirals into histrionics. He will be very hard pressed to show the letter to anyone, especially anyone asking after it. Anyone talking about the letter is obviously trying to get him to pay up.

Laertes has not told Vilarious about this since Vilarious' business is "far more important than my problems." He obviously feels beholden to Carmine and feels absolutely awful that "I got him killed." Unfortunately, for Laertes, this sort of situation is Vilarious' bailiwick. This sort of trivia could be taken care of as a matter of course and Vilarious will be quite wrath to find that Laertes has wasted so much time over so little an issue.

Volens has been translating all this to the rest of the villagers. The villagers think Vilarious has left Laertes to rot while he is "out gallivanting around" when in reality Laertes has not told Vilarious about the situation at all.

[[End Insert]]

[[Begin Insert: Training Apprentices]]

Apprentices are trained en masse in the basics of Scribe Latin, Speak Latin, Hermes Lore, other such important matters. This way the older wizards can expect a certain level of education in their apprentices and don't have to waste time in dealing with the gritty parts of teaching a bonehead youngster these things. Laertes is very good at getting such things across and is much respected for the time he saves others, and Cavernius covenant makes a very good living off of his efforts.

[[End Insert]]

[The Attack]

After the characters have been at the covenant site for a short period of time, a hue and cry arises, "The sheep are being slaughtered by raiders!" If the story starts to get slow, have an attack occur. Alternatively, have the characters settle in, get the sense that they are visitors in a home where those who live there do not want them there. If the characters are arrogant, have them arrive too late at the scene to do much. If the characters are still in the village trying to talk to the villagers or Laertes, then they can respond almost immediately, if they wish. If they are at the covenant, it will take them a bit more time to respond, meaning several more dead sheep or maybe a covenfolk or two. If they dally in responding the raiders will soon grow bored with their slaughter and look to the village itself for loot. Keep in mind where the covenant's few grogs are placed. During the daytime, three are at the covenant. One is off duty in the village and the Seneschal is with the characters. The Seneschal will secure the covenant and then run off to lead his remaining troops into battle.

If the characters go out to the pasture (several hundred yards around the mountain) they will find a dozen marauders killing sheep. The off-duty grog will be running out to the pasture with them at this point.

[Marauders]

Characteristics: Int +0, Per +1, Pre -1, Com +0, Str +2, Stm +2, Dex +1, Qik +1

Size: 0

Confidence: 3

Personality Traits: Brave -1, Mean +2

Weapon/Attack	Init	Atk	Dfn	Dam	Fat
Brawling (fist)	+5	+4	+4	+5	+5
Axe	+7	+6	+7	+8	+6
Short Bow	+4	+4	—	+4	+5

Soak: +4

Fatigue levels: OK, -1, -3, -5, Unconscious

Body levels: OK, -1, -3, -5, Incapacitated

Abilities: Bows 3, Brawl 3, Single Weapon 4

Equipment: Short Bow, Axe, Heavy Leather Hauberk

Encumbrance: 0

After they lose the first man, they must all make Brave rolls of 6+. If they make it continue on their mayhem; if not they run. Subtract -1 to the roll per death or person who routs on their side, whether they know of it or not. Also subtract -1 for each warrior or combatant they are outnumbered by. Do not subtract anything if they outnumber their opponents.

If the characters wait for any amount of time, they may find a half dozen marauders in the village looting and killing peasants. The Seneschal will have taken one of the grogs from Vinitania's retinue and is leading the charge against the enemy. Once the Seneschal is on the scene, the villagers will stop wailing and running amok and will rally behind him. They are armed with various knives and pointy sticks, shovels, and hoes. Nevertheless, without the character's help, the village will be decimated.

During all this the gatekeeper will run off to defend "his people." He wants to do all he can, especially since the covenant has retired him. He is feeling worthless and wants to prove himself. Most likely, this will only get him killed.

If the characters don't do anything the following events occur during the raid:

- The shepherds run to warn the village.
- The sheepdogs get killed fighting the marauders in the north fields
- The marauders decimate the sheep in the north fields
- A hue and cry rises in the town
- The off duty guard runs to defend.
- The gatekeeper follows shortly behind.
- The balance of the marauders not engaged by whoever goes to meet them arrive in the town
- The Seneschal organizes what guards are left
- The marauders fight the villagers. Six marauders die, about half the villagers and all the grogs who left the covenant and the gatekeeper die. The Seneschal is wounded. The marauders burn the town on the way out.

[[Begin Insert: Count Orsini]]

Basil has a hit squad he uses for various nasty deeds. This group usually wanders about in the wilds and meets a messenger on occasion for pay, and Basil acts like a messenger from Count Orsini. He has told them various lies to keep them in his employ. He also pays them really well. This count does not exist. While this group could identify the messenger, Basil has taken the precaution of changing his appearance whenever he meets them. However, certain details stand out in this disguise. Through careful questioning, it may come out that he wore a ring with a bear upon it. Orsini means bear. In his normal life, Basil has coat of arms that is a bear rampant. That is the link the characters need to find out who has done this. Int + Hermes Lore rolls of 15+ would reveal that Basil has this pseudonym. Research at the library doesn't even take a day—the librarian knows this off the top of his head.

Basil has ordered the attack because he is the only one of his covenmates that currently has the ability to strike against anyone besides his own covenmates. He blames Cavernius covenant for the death of their leader so he is taking this opportunity to strike at them, hopefully insuring his place as its new leader.

[[End Insert]]

After the attack, the characters can find out from the corpses a convoluted story. Apparently the marauders have been in the employ of a local count who has been politically disadvantaged due to his falling wool prices. He has hired them for various raids and extortion plots. This village is producing too many sheep and is destroying his trade. They've been sent to stop the village from taking over the wool trade, or so they have been told by the messenger of Count Orsini

[The secret entrance]

Inside the largest of the stone buildings, set far below the surface in the deepest part of the overcrowded storerooms and behind a small alcove there is a curious shrine. The dimly lit room brightens as people enter. Within a master-crafted, multi-arched, and ornately detailed room, two statues stand opposite two similar statues, each in an alcove betwixt various emblems roughly three paces wide and five paces deep. At the end of the small chamber there is an archway leading farther into the darkness. The finely crafted statues depict with lifelike realism both men and women in very formal attire. Given the non-flattering detail these could only have been real people. Each holds some symbol or item in their stone hands and stands across from a depiction of mythical creatures.

The first, on the left side of the room, is that of a beautiful, lithe, young woman, holding a shield and spear. She stands across from a representation of a hydra, its thirteen heads turning back on itself. This represents the trials of the Order, especially the Schism War, and how magi must be vigilant against such strife.

The second statue, located on the right side of the room, is a young man wearing the robes of a scholar, his chiseled face and harsh demeanor scowl at the emblem across from him. In his left hand he holds an apple, in the right a silver key. Opposite him is the symbol of a great mantichore, a creature with the head of a man, the body of a tiger, and the tail of a scorpion. This represents the need to teach the youth respect and morality well as knowledge, for power untamed turns to evil.

The third statue depicts a mature older woman, in royal attire, accoutrements of gold and gems showing the greatness of her station. Her head may be bowed in submission, but her commanding presence flows throughout the chamber drawing all eyes to her. In her hand she bears a plain and undecorated washbasin. She stands across from the image of a dove sitting above a crown. This depicts the need for humility, along with leadership. For those with Order of Hermes lore, a 12+ may reveal the statue's identity as that of Trianoma.

The last statue is of a wrinkled, ancient, and unkempt person of indiscernible gender, barefoot and bleeding from many sores upon its gnarled feet, but wearing grandiose robes and holding an ornate staff in one hand. In its other hand is a golden emblem of three snakes, coiled together, their tongues touching, forming a triangle. This person looks across at a griffon, standing on the panicle of a mountain. This portrays the need to work for the greater good of a common ideal, no matter what the cost the individual must bear. For those with an Order of Hermes lore roll of 6+, the emblem is that of the Order itself, as was depicted in ancient times. For those with an Order of Hermes lore roll of 15+, the statue is of Guorna The Fetid, never a member of the order, but the master of both Tytalus, Tremere, and possibly, as some have come to believe, Jerbiton.

This chamber is highly magical, anyone with second sight is able to see it from several paces away before the lights brighten fully. There is a magical ritual to be performed here before the traps ahead will be disarmed. The supplicant must bring water and a cloth, which is placed in Trianoma's basin, then wash the feet of Guorna the Fetid. Once done, all traps are safe and the pit ahead is sealed, unnoticeable.

A polished corridor exactly one pace wide and three paces tall slopes upward for several hundred paces, eventually allowing entrance to the lower areas of the covenant. The area from here forward is protected under the *Aegis* of the covenant and any magic must penetrate that before it takes affect. Without following the specific ritual described above, the passageway ahead is deadly. Barely five paces past the next archway is a pit four paces long and as wide as the corridor and up to 3 paces deep, covered by an illusion. The pit is filled with rusted blades. Anyone falling in the pit must soak +15 damage. The wounds act as if caused by *The Wound That Weeps* (PeCo 15).

If someone steps beyond the pit, without enacting the washing ritual, there is a terrible rumbling, and a perfectly smooth, solid stone wheel rolls with great speed crushing anything within the passage. The wheel completely fills the passageway. When the wheel gets to the pit, it falls through the illusion into the pit, where it disappears before hitting the bottom. The cylinder is a simple Creo Terram spell of Diameter duration, just enough time to roll down the corridor and into the pit. If stopped within the corridor, after the duration is up, the existing stone cylinder disappears, only to be replaced by another at the top of the corridor. This repeats until there is no one left in the corridor or the room with the statues.

The damage caused by the impact of the stone is akin to the damage caused by falling from a great height. For anyone hit by the stone wheel near the base of the passage, roll a quality die + 60. Farther up the corridor the damage is reduced as the wheel has not gotten up to speed, but damage is never less than a quality die +20. The stone rubs the sides and the roof of the corridor intermittently on its way to the bottom of the hill. Without magic someone caught in the corridor must race ahead of the rolling doom and jump over or into the pit to avoid it.

An Awareness + Per roll of 6+ will allow someone to identify the danger in time and attempt to avoid the stone. A subsequent roll of Athletics + Qik of 3+ will be required to take any appropriate action.

The corridor ends in a chamber similar to the one at the bottom of the hill, but lacking the statuary. Beyond this are the subterranean, lower levels of the covenant, long ago sealed away for reasons unknown.

[Common knowledge]

“Yep, there’s never been an attack on us while we’ve been in with the maga. At least not from the monster.”

— Claudio, off duty at the time.

This is a list of things that the villagers will be able to tell the characters about what has been happening to the covenant over the last few years. By all means feel free to make up whatever to throw the players off track or just have fun. See Appendix 2 for complete details.

- People seem to be missing on or around a full moon or other astrological event. One might have been in the observatory and four were in the dark of the moon. There has been at least one person missing per season, approximately.
- The victims were all engulfed in darkness.
- Some reports of howling like a dog or mad beast.
- Some leave behind blood, shoes, hats, or other things carried.
- The only survivors have been “taken” later over time. None who survived are now around for questioning.
- Mostly covenfolk and grogs were taken. The autocrat who was taken outside the council chamber. There are several apprentices missing and no magi were ever touched. However, two magi are “incapacitated” and one is hardly ever there....
- People only go missing from certain areas. Some areas *seem* safe.
- They will ascribe any number of monsters and beasties to the disappearances. In all cases, the “monster” came from somewhere else, Hesperus, Hell, or the town down the way.